

BALLADS OF THE ISLE OF MAN.

TRANSLATED FROM THE MANX.

BY GEORGE BORROW.

BROWN WILLIAM.

THIS ballad was written in consequence of the execution of William Christian, generally called William Donn, or Brown William, from the darkness of his complexion, who was shot at Hango Hill, near Castletown, in the Isle of Man, shortly after the Restoration, for alleged treason to the Derby family, who long possessed the sovereignty of Man. Christian had been Receiver-General of the island, and on its being threatened by a powerful fleet and army, sent by Cromwell, had deemed it expedient to deliver it up on honourable conditions, the little kingdom being in an almost utterly defenceless state. For doing so, however, on the downfall of the Protectorate, he was tried, and, being convicted by a packed jury, was shot. He died with great courage, and with his last breath prayed God to forgive his enemies. His body was buried, the day after his execution, in the chancel of the church of Malew, or Saint Lupus, in the neighbourhood of Castletown. He was a man of irreproachable morals and of great piety; had old Danish blood in his veins, and lived principally at a place a little way to the

north of Castletown, which bears the Danish or Norwegian name of Ronaldsway, or Ranild's Oe. Christian has been mentioned in a certain novel by Walter Scott, called "Peveril of the Peak," for the Manx materials of which Scott was chiefly indebted to an acquaintance of his long resident in Man, and who wrote a very creditable history of the island. Not daring to attack Christian directly, whom he hated on account of his puritanical principles, he gave him a side-thrust, by making it appear that he had a brother, whom he represents as a consummate villain, though the truth is that Christian had no brother at all. The name of Christian is still held in the highest veneration in Man; and the ballad of "Brown William," which gives an account of the betrayal of the poor patriot, and the vengeance taken by the hand of God upon his murderers, is the most popular of all the wild songs of Ellan Vannin.

BROWN WILLIAM.

LET no one in greatness too confident be,
Nor trust in his kindred, though high their degree;
For envy and rage will lay any man low:
Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with woe.

Thou wast the Receiver of Mona's fair state,
Thy conduct was noble, thy wisdom was great,
And ne'er of thy rule did she weariness show:
Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with woe.

Thy right hand was Earley, and Theah thy right eye;
Thy state caused thy foemen with rage to swell high;
And envy and rage will lay any man low:
Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with woe.

How blest thy condition in fair Ronaldsway!
Thy mansion, how stately! thy garden, how gay!
But oh! what disasters from envy do flow:
Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with woe.

'Twas said at thy trial, by men void of faith,
The king, by a letter, demanded thy death:
The jury was frighten'd, and dared not say "No!"
Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with woe.

The clan of wild Colcad could ne'er be at rest
Whilst the race of Christeen their own acres possess'd;
And envy and spite will bring any man low:
Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with woe.

A band of adulterers, curst and unholy,
For Ronaldsway lust, as they did for Lough Molley;
Of Naboth, the tragedy's played here anew:
Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with woe.

Not one of the band but received his just meed
Who acted a part in that damnable deed:
To dwindle away the whole band was not slow:
Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with woe.

To Callaghyn-doo, and to Vannyster roam,
And call on the Colcad till hoarse ye become:
Gone, gone is the name so well known long ago:
Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with woe.

A cripple was Robin for many years long,
Who troubled and bullied the island when strong:
His own friends of tending him weary did grow:
Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with woe.

Sly Richard took ship with thy blood on his hand;
But God can avenge on the sea as on land;
The waves would not bear him, but whelm'd him, I
trow:

Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with woe.

And now, if a few of the seed do remain,
They're vile as the thistles and briars of the plain ;
They ply for their neighbours the pick and the hoe :
Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with woe.

Should ye walk through all Man you'll find no one, I
reckon,

To mourn for the name that was once in Beemachan ;
But thousands of poor who rejoice that 'tis low :
Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with woe.

Proceed to Cregany, and Balla-lough green,
But where's there a Colcad to bid ye walk in ?
By strangers their homes and their lands are held now :
Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with woe.

Great Scarlett, in wealth who dwelt down by the bay,
Must toil now with paupers for sixpence a-day ;
And oft, as I've heard, has no morsel to chew :
Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with woe.

The band by whose weapons the great Cæsar died
Were hunted by foes, and all peace were denied ;
Not one died the death of kind Nature, O, no !
Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with woe.

So it fared with the band by whom Willie did die,
Their lands are a waste, their names stink to the sky :
They melted like rime in the ruddy sun's glow :
Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with woe.

But comfort I take, for 'tis common report
There are shoots of dear Will who are sitting at court,
Who have punished his foes by king's mandate,
although

Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with woe.

O, 'tis pleasant to think, when one's wither'd and grey,
There's race of Brown William in fair Ronaldsway,
That his foemen are crush'd, and their faces can't show,
While the clan of Christeen have no trouble or woe.*

To the counsellors false, both in church and in state,
Bear the public of Mona both loathing and hate,
Who set man against man, and the peace would break
now,
As thy murder, Brown William, broke hearts long ago.

The lord of our island, Duke Athol the great,
They would gladly persuade, with their parle and their
prate,
The corner-stones high of his house to lay low,
And to King, Duke and Mona are foemen, I trow.

MOLLIE CHARANE.

THIS ballad is of considerable antiquity, being at least as old as the commencement of the last century. It is founded on a real character—a miser—who by various means acquired a considerable property, and was the first person who ever left "tocher," that is fortune, to daughter in Man. His name was Mollie Charane, which words interpreted are "Praise the Lord." He lived and possessed an estate on the curragh, a tract of boggy ground, formerly a forest, on the northern side of the island, between the mighty mountains of the Snefell range and the sea. Two families bearing the name of the miser, and descended from him, still reside upon the curragh, at the distance of about half-a-mile from each other. The name of the head of the principal

* Here the old ballad—I speak of the original Manx—concludes. The two following stanzas are comparatively modern.

family is John Mollie Charane ; that of the other Billy Mollie Charane. In the autumn of the year 1855 I found my way across the curragh to the house of John Mollie Charane. On my knocking at the door it was opened by a respectable-looking elderly female, of about sixty, who, after answering a question which I put, namely, which was the way to Balla Giberagh, asked me to walk in, saying that I looked faint and weary. On my entering she made me sit down, brought me a basin of buttermilk to drink, and asked me what brought me to the curragh. Merely to see Mollie Charane, I replied. Whereupon she said that he was not at home, but that she was his wife, and any business I had with her husband I might communicate to her. I told her that my only motive for coming was to see a descendant of the person mentioned in the celebrated song. She then looked at me with some surprise, and observed that there was indeed a song about a person of the family, but that he had been dead and gone many a long year, and she wondered I should give myself the trouble to come to such a place as the curragh to see people merely because one of their forebears was mentioned in a song. I said that, however strange the reason I gave might seem to her, it was the true one ; whereupon she replied, that as I was come I was welcome. I had a great deal of discourse with her about her family. Amongst other things, she told me that she had a son in Ohio, who lived in a village where the Manx language was spoken, the greater number of the people being Manx. She was quite alone in the house when I arrived, with the exception of two large dogs, who at first barked, and were angry at me, but eventually came and licked my hands. After conversing with the respectable old lady for about half-an-hour, I got up, shook her by the hand, and departed for Balla Giberagh. The house was a neat little white house, fronting the west, having a clump of trees near it. However miserly the Mollie Charane of the song may have been, I experienced no lack of hospitality in the house of his descendant.

MOLLIE CHARANE.

"O, MOLLIE CHARANE, where got you your gold ?"
Lone, lone you have left me here.

"O not in the curragh, deep under the mould."
Lone, lone, and void of cheer.

"O, Mollie Charane, where got you your stock ?"
Lone, lone you have left me here.

"O not in the curragh from under a block."
Lone, lone, and void of cheer.

"O, Mollie Charane, where got you your goods ?"
Lone, lone you have left me here.

"O not in the curragh from under two sods."
Lone, lone, and void of cheer.

Two pair of stockings, and one pair of shoes—
Lone, lone you have left me here—
For twenty-six years old Mollie did use.
Lone, lone, and void of cheer.

His stockings were white, but his sandals, alack !—
Lone, lone you have left me here—
Were not of one colour, one white, t'other black.
Lone, lone, and void of cheer.

One sandal was white and t'other dark brown—
Lone, lone you have left me here ;—
But he'd two of one colour* for kirk and for town.
Lone, lone, and void of cheer.

"O, father, I really can't walk by your side"—
Lone, lone you have left me here—
"If you go to the church in those sandals of hide."
Lone, lone, and void of cheer.

"O, daughter, my dear, if my brogues give you pain"—
Lone, lone you have left me here—
"There's that in the coffer will make you look fain."
Lone, lone, and void of cheer.

A million of curses on Mollie Charane—
Lone, lone you have left me here—
The first who gave tocher to daughter in Man.
Lone, lone, and void of cheer.

* It is said that he contrived to have two of one colour by rubbing pipeclay on the black one.